



Appraising the Leadership Learning Opportunities of Secondary School Administrators in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Professional developmental accounts for work development and developmental needs of workforce in different stages of their careers. Hence, this study examined the perspectives of secondary school administrators on their leadership learning opportunities in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The justification of the study was in a systematic assessment of professional leadership learning for capacity building among the school administrators. A sample size of 88 respondents was drawn from a population of 104 secondary school administrators (principals and vice principals) using a stratified random sampling technique. Data collection was done using a researcher designed questionnaire. The instrument was validated and had reliability co-efficient of 0.834. The data collected were analyzed using percentage score and independent t-test statistics. The study revealed that, through leadership learning, the administrators acquired high level of experiential and situation learning opportunities but low level of expansive learning opportunities and critical thinking. The learning opportunities were significantly positive to gender, experience, qualification and computer literacy while they did not depend on age and geographical location. Hence, leadership learning were affected by the learners' activity, resources and school improvement. Some of the recommendations made included mandatory yearly training of the school administrators for integrated skills and opportunities in school administration.

Keywords: Opportunities, learning, leadership, administrators.

INTRODUCTION

Leadership in school administration is crucial for influencing behavior of school programmes and attainment of educational goals. This make leadership learning to be of great relevance to school effectiveness and school improvement, contributes to increase growth of international interest in school training and continuing professional development (Bush, 2011; Ekanem, 2015). In FRN (2004:40), the enormous task in the teaching profession is recognized. This includes among others, the need for in-service training as integral part of continuing teacher's education in order to take care of all inadequacies. Based on this background, professional learning opportunities of in-service school administrators becomes a central issue of concern to the researchers. The learning which may be formal and informal learning provision, have implications for career profession developmental needs.

Ekpo (2015) emphasizes substantial investment on in-service training of serving secondary school administrators by the Akwa Ibom state government between 2009 and 2014. This period was termed common transformation period of the state as it witnesses increase in-service training investment with expectations to bring forth significance democratic dividends in the school system and the society. The state attention has been in building a continuum from initial teachers' training to induction and in-service

training. This supports the principles of continuing professional development (Jones & Stammers, 2011). However, it is not clear how effective such learning preparation of the school administrators can promote authentic leadership learning or the extent it can apply in practice to achieve school improvement. Thus, the researcher sets out to investigate the leadership learning opportunities of secondary school administrators in Akwalbom State, Nigeria between 2009 and 2014.

The growing emphasis on leadership learning and accountability drive professional development. The professional development is fueled by widespread recognition that administrators must become knowledgeable and skillful to undertake their job effectively. Today's school leadership learning represents an unprecedented modification of self through environment and experience, be it classical conditioning, operant conditioning or conditional learning. Myers (2012) noted that the challenge of school leadership learning requires great opportunities to permeate and enhance school life socially, economically and politically. It demands more of school administrators' commitment to basing their administrative decisions on sound knowledge, theories and aptitude to work through learning devoid of assumptions. The professional development choice, learning turning points (critical events) and leadership commitment to the learning provisions are anchored in the concept of leadership learning opportunities (Huberman, 2013).

Leadership learning opportunities (LLOs) involved the development of leaders through activity of reading and studying (training) in order to get knowledge and chances to work effectively and efficiently. This concept gives prominence to school leadership in decision making as the administrators find solutions to problems on daily basis (Peretomode, 2004). LLOs is capable of addressing not only the formal education needs but also expanding the needs for informal education in the areas of teaching, planning and administration.

Leadership learning connotes a relatively permanent change in the leadership behavior due to leaders experience, interaction and exposure to new information or ideas. In Bellingham (2007), learning brings about knowledge. This confirms that leadership behavior is that which demonstrates independently a given knowledge, skills, values and attitude which were unable to demonstrate before a learning situation. The policy of mandatory continuous leadership programme of school administrators in Akwalbom State tend to be a legendary but with doubt of authentic leadership learning. It becomes critical that learning opportunities of school administrators be adapted to the needs of the administrators.

Some studies such as Brookfield (2013), Holtzkamp (2013) and Fuller & Unwin (2014) report that learning opportunities from workplace perspectives require an integration of both personal and organizational development. This means that leadership learning opportunities depends on leadership needs. In contextualizing this research, demographic characteristics of school administrators would impact on their leadership learning opportunities. In Afe (2002) and Ekanem (2012), these studies show that age, gender, experience qualification and environment have direct relationship with workforce behaviours. Wright (2005) aptly revealed that the behavioural change in the workforce ultimately engender knowledge culture in schools in order to survive and thrive. Active school administrators through leadership learning opportunities need to network in order to work collaboratively in finding shared solutions to secondary education problems.

This study systematically appraises the bases of three paradigms of learning opportunities namely: experiential and situated learning, expansive learning and critical thinking. Experiential learning is learning through doing, experience, reflection on observation and active experimentation. Situation learning is that stimulated through social interaction and progressive enhancement of performance (Wenger, 2010). Expansive learning opportunity is learner-centered in that it allows for autonomy and self-determination according to individual needs and interest (Holtzkamp, 2013). Finally, critical thinking is learning through reflection to better leaders and widen the institutional/policy contexts (Brookfield, 2013). The three identified paradigms tend to provide options in response to problems encountered in work activities (Schon, 2013). This becomes necessary since the school administrators champion the cause of schools, protect the stakeholders and ensure accountability to higher educational authorities. This study therefore appraised how authentic and practical the leadership learning opportunities of secondary school administrators would better secondary schools in Akwalbom state, Nigeria.

Statement of the problem

It has been observed that poor school administration is prevalent among secondary schools in AkwaIbom State, Nigeria. To this end, it has become a problem to the stakeholders in education especially with increase government investment in leadership training and development in the state (2009-2014). The administrators tend to fail in receiving functional training that could provide the desired leadership learning opportunities. They lack the administrative skills, knowledge and aptitude necessary to undertake the required school job efficiently as stated in the National Policy on Education 2004 revised. Hence, their cognitive domain seems not alert to the school leadership challenges among which is administrative crisis.

Also, the demographic characteristics of the school administrators supposed to be essential tools for leadership learning opportunities but are characterized with different challenges. These include gender differences, leaders age differential, non-computer compliancy, geographical location and differences in leaders educational qualifications and work experience. The leadership learning preparations of the school administrators seem not to promote authentic leadership learning for basic learning opportunities. Inadequate learning opportunities could be seen from the school administrators' professional performance deterioration in school administration. The above observation prompted the researcher to investigate the leadership opportunities of secondary school administrators in order to boost their capacity for effective school management.

Research questions

Two research questions were formulated for the study;

- i. What are the leadership learning opportunities levels of secondary school administrators?
- ii. How do leadership learning opportunities contribute to the perceived learning needs of secondary schools administrators?

Hypothesis

The leadership learning opportunities do not significantly depend on the demographic characteristics of secondary school administrators.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted survey research design and carried out in AkwaIbom State (AKS) of Nigeria. The research design was most appropriate as samples were collected about groups of individuals with same characteristics inference and generalizations to the population. 88 subjects were randomly selected from 104 secondary schools administrators (principals and vice principals) that made up the Uyo Senatorial district of AkwaIbom State, Nigeria. The random sampling technique was done in such a way as to ensure equal numbers (44 each) of participants from rural and urban areas. Further breakdown of the sample size are 47 males and 41 females.

The instrument for data collection is a researcher developed questionnaire titled "Leadership Learning Opportunities Questionnaire (LLOQ)". The instrument had two sections, A and B. Section A elicited demographic data and 12 items in Section B, measuring the paradigms of the secondary schools administrators learning opportunities. Four-point rating scale was used with the response categories of strongly agree – 4, agree – 3, disagree – 2, and strongly disagree-1. The instrument was validated, tested for reliability (with Cronbach alpha index of 0.834). The questionnaire copies were personally administered and with the help of two research assistants. The returned rate was 100 percent. Statistical analysis techniques of percentage score and independent t-test were applied on the data.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Research question 1: *What are the leadership learning opportunity levels of secondary school administrators?*

Table 1 revealed learning opportunities gains acquired by the secondary school administrators. They include experiential learning (78.41%), situated learning (73.86%), expansive learning (46.59) and critical reflective thinking (43.18%). This indicated that there were higher level of opportunities in experimental and situated learning opportunities than in expansive learning and critical thinking.

Table 1. Informat profiles of participants Demographic characteristics of secondary school administrators in Akwalbom State Nigeria

Characteristics	Number	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	47	53.41
Female	41	45.59
Age		
24 – 30	5	5.68
31 – 35	10	11.36
36 – 40	17	19.32
41 – 50	39	44.32
51 and above	17	19.32
Administrative experience		
Below 5	11	12.50
6 – 10	12	13.64
16 – 20	21	23.86
11 – 15	35	39.77
21 and above	9	10.23
Educational qualification		
B.Sc/BA/B.Ed/HND	13	14.77
M.Sc/MA/M.Ed	67	76.14
Ph.D	8	9.09
Computer literacy		
Non	12	13.64
Very little	4	4.55
Little	51	46.59
Very knowledge	21	35.22
Geographical location		
Urban	44	50.00
Rural	44	50.00

Research questions 2: *How do leadership learning opportunities contribute to the perceived learning needs of secondary school administrators?*

Table 2. Learning opportunities levels of secondary school administrators in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

Paradigm	Learning opportunity Gain		Learning Opportunity Loss		Total %
	N	%	N	%	
Experiential learning	69	78.41	19	21.59	100
Situated learning	65	73.86	23	26.14	100
Expansive learning	41	46.59	47	53.41	100
Critics/reflective thinking	38	43.18	50	55.82	100

Table 2 equally showed that the leadership learning were not well coordinated in the state. However, they agreed that the levels of learning opportunities have minimally developed their three domains of knowledge (cognitive, psychomotor and affective). The opportunities improved interaction with others though with low level of critical thinking towards poor internal efficiency. The computer literacy level was low among the administrators with very little from those in the rural secondary schools. Generally, most of the administrators' inadequacies were not taking care of in the in-service training programme for attainment of educational goals.

Table 3.Independent t-test analysis of dependence of leadership learning opportunities on demographic characteristics of secondary school administrators (N = 88)

S/N	Profile	Group	N	X	SD	t-value
1.	Gender	Male	47	32.79	4.91	-9.69*
		Female	41	33.29	4.18	
2.	Age	Below 35 years	15	40.12	6.91	1.61
		35 years & above	73	40.17	7.06	
3.	Experience	Below 10 years	23	40.96	7.38	5.12*
		10 years & above	65	37.94	6.54	
4.	Qualification	Below M.Sc/MA/MEd	75	41.13	6.71	4.07*
		Above M.Sc/MA/MEd	13	40.93	7.02	
5.	Computer compliance	Literate	16	40.24	6.98	2.84*
		Non-literate	72	38.36	6.02	
6.	Geographical location	Urban	44	40.11	6.92	-0.11
		Rural	44	40.17	7.08	
	Total	Sample	88	40.14	6.91	

*P<0.05, df = 86, critical t=1.990.

Hypothesis: The leadership learning opportunities do not significantly depend on the demographic characteristics of secondary school administrators.

The leadership learning opportunities were significantly positive towards gender, experience, qualification and computer literacy. The results presented in Table 3 indicated that leadership learning opportunities significantly depend on gender (t=9.69; P<0.05), experience (t=5.12; P<0.05), qualification (t=4.07; p<0.05) and computer literacy. However, leadership learning opportunities did not significantly depend on age (t=1.61; P>0.05) and geographical location (t=0.11; p>0.05).

DISCUSSION

Research question one showed that leadership learning has minimally developed the administrators. This results in experiential and situation learning opportunities acquired, higher than the expansive learning opportunity and critical thinking. This could be attributed to the fact that leadership learning was a dynamic instrument of change as an integrated practical and skill based training for understanding and development of mind for better future (Myers, 2012).The experiential opportunity was acquired by the administrators through involvement in practical issues which enable them solve problems, demonstrated new ideas and improved leadership capacity. The situational learning opportunity was promoted among the administrators through observation, coaching, modeling and action learning.

However, there were low level expansive learning opportunities and critical thinking. The finding was explained in their deprivation of allowing for autonomy and self-determination according to the administrators' needs and interest. This indicated that the leadership learning was not learner-centered.

This could be a compelling reason for low level of critical thinking as they had low ability to imagine and explain alternative strategies that could overcome obstacles at work for school improvement. This finding was in consonance with Holzkamp (2013) in which lack of school head's interest in teachers' development accounted for poor competency.

Research questions two revealed that the leadership learning opportunities were not significant in relation to the perceived needs of the school administrators. The inexperienced administrators were unable to adequately meet the physical demands as they lack confidence in leadership capacity. Thus, they felt exhausted (Brookfield, 2013).

Again, the administrators could not be led through their administrative problems which beset them at workplace. This could be attributed to the unfavourable ratio of trainers to trainees which made learning difficult. The leadership learning opportunities did not satisfy the school-based requirement. The explanation of this finding was that the two components of the leadership learning identified as educational policy and management skills lacked sufficient depth which could have impact on practice. This was at variance with the need for in-service training in FRN (2004:40), that continuing teachers education should take care of all inadequacies.

The research hypothesis revealed that the learning opportunities were significantly positive towards gender, experience, qualification and computer literacy. It did not depend on age and geographical location of the administrators. The findings showed that professional learning could be influenced by learners, activity, resources and school improvement strategy (Middlewood, 2012). The professional development of the administrators accounted for not only the development of work, but also different developmental needs of leadership in different stages of their careers.

The school leadership reflected the personality (in terms of gender, experience, qualification and compute literacy) and values of the administrators. Leadership being a potent factor in school, inspires self-development to be effective administrators (Afe, 2002). In the other hand, despite the ages of the administrators, they found it difficult to build capability to analyze and solve problems in the ongoing process of learning. Also, the urban and rural school administrators had equal opportunities with low capacity in social networking, inadequate provision of financial/material resources and poor inter-personal skills which could not improve quality of secondary education.

CONCLUSION

This study has been able to establish that leadership opportunities of secondary school administrators could not efficiently improve school administration in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Though the administrators gained more in experimental and situation learning opportunities than in expansive learning opportunity and critical thinking, they lacked the requisite self-determination and capacity to overcome administrative problems at workplace. Professional leadership learning could be influenced by variables such as learners, activity, resources and school improvement. The learning opportunities of school administrators depended directly on the demographic characteristics of the administrators. The professional development which accounted for developmental needs and development of work, could determine professional performance, hence, the improvement in school administration. Therefore, contextual factors for the administrators' leadership learning opportunities could determine the possible choices of active or passive path towards effective school management.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- i. Policy makers in secondary education should factor in mandatory yearly training devoid of age and geographical location of the school administrators. This will integrate different skills and opportunities of the leaders towards school improvement in administration.
- ii. The learning preparation should give room for effective interactions of experienced and less experienced administrators in being able to analyze and solve problems. This will consciously build leadership capacity for good school administration.

- iii. The leadership learning time should be optimal enough to improve school leadership and management practice. This will help to maximize the expansive learning opportunities and critical thinking among the school administrators.
- iv. The leadership learning should involve an informal leadership forum in which the administrators can discuss vital issues in school administration. This will assist them in solving problems and significant challenges for the school management.
- v. Government should adequately provide for Information Technology (IT) tools while the policy makers in education intensify training in computer literacy among the secondary schools administrators. This is capable of enhancing the school system efficiency.

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